

Obituary for Stan Whitbread

Stanley Bertram Whitbread (Stan Whitbread, 98) passed away peacefully and gracefully in the early morning of Tuesday, October 29, 2024 in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada at his long term care facility, the Edmonton General Continuing Care Centre, in room 9C24 in the arms of his daughter, Katherine, and of Keshia Coursaux, his devoted friend and End of Life Doula. Stan's life was valiantly extended and enhanced by MyKieng Chau, his devoted friend and Companion, and by the tireless, compassionate staff of 9C and many others working in the facility.

Stan is predeceased by his wife of 68 years, (Kathleen) Derwyn Whitbread née McLaughlin. The pair lived Derwyn's final few months together on unit 9C where, by happenstance, there was a special hallway almost like a short cut or secret passage between their two rooms. Stan checked on Derwyn frequently via the little corridor. Whenever they saw each other during the comings and goings at mealtimes and other times, they exclaimed their love for one another.

Stan was predeceased as well by his father, Bertram John Whitbread, his mother, Elizabeth Foulkes Hughes Whitbread, and his dear sister, Eleanor Elizabeth Simpson, of Topeka, Kansas.

Stan is survived by his adoring daughter, Katherine Eve Whitbread, his granddaughter, Aurora Whitbread, and by his beloved younger brother, David Hughes Whitbread. Stan and Derwyn's devotion to their extended family made "children" of their steadfast Nephew and Niece, brother and sister, Robert Madill and Lama Dechi (née) Jane Madill and of Stan's cousin, Dan Began. The deepening of relationships pulled many extended family members closer so that cousins feel like nieces and nephews and friends feel like family. Of special note are Bob Griffith, Barb and Gerry Sinn (niece/nephew-like cousins). Similarly they were very close to their dear friends husband and wife, Mike McTeague and Thérèse Doucet; husband and wife, Joanne and Dan Sydiaha; international friends, John and June Thoburn; friend, Judy Dragon; mother and son, Anne and Christophe Sadelain; father and son, Jack

and Kenton Harmer; husband and wife, Steve and Theresa Whelan; their friend and Stan's one-time Secretary, Elaine (Livermore) Smith; friend and daughter of good friends, Dr. Lanice Jones; friend, Donna Hamar; and the many other friends and extended family who enjoyed their welcoming home, lake property, gourmet club and innumerable festivities. Stan and Derwyn both relied on and adored their Doctor, Monica Werner, and their neighbours, Moira, Kevin and Bruno (deceased) Mahl and Kirk and Danette (tragically deceased) Heitauer. Stan was impressed by and proud of his other Nieces, Lynn Whitbread, Dawn Whitbread and Holly McLaughlin, as well as his other Nephews, Jim, Ian, David (deceased) and Bert Simpson. (Anyone not mentioned here is absent due only to the writer's myopia.)

Stan was born June 29, 1926 in Vermillion, Alberta. His father, Bert, was a District Agriculturalist. His mother, Beth, had given up her job as a Psychiatric Nurse, in favour of marriage and raising a family. Stan remembers her baking for neighbours and events as both a labour of love and an assertion of herself into the community. His regal and impressive elder Sister, Eleanor, was a hard act to follow in school in the small towns they lived in and then in South Calgary where he attended High School. The Great Depression shaped his opinions about money, debt and gambling which remained sources of ambivalence for him throughout his life, sometimes in ways very charming. Although he never bought a lottery ticket and rarely entered a free draw, he somehow once won a barbeque and only his wife's insistence prevented him from giving it away as what she called, "filthy, dirty lucre."

His coming of age was strongly influenced by another ambivalence. He was slightly too young to become one of the military men, especially the pilots, for whom the girls at the time went woozy. He had only just received his draft papers when WWII ended. He never lost his fancy to become a pilot but he pivoted first to a path toward becoming an auto mechanic and then into teaching. One of the advantages of this combination was that his first placement as teacher was in a one-room schoolhouse in Rocky Mountain House where he taught several grades at once to a generous handful of kids. But he couldn't get a loan for a

new car so he acquired a car with no brakes. He allowed himself to coast to a stop whenever required. Once, to avoid a collision with a train, he knew to jam the car into reverse.

His first Halloween as a teacher, he was convinced that, as a new teacher, he would be a target of juvenile holiday mischief. Therefore he preemptively set up countermeasures in the form of surprise ghosts, a water bucket and noisy cans on a string that were to be triggered by kids sneaking in to do their worst. He settled in the darkness nearby to wait. The kids never showed up but a nearby horse had paused its repast of crunchy grass to observe the human hiding in the bushes. When the horse started crunching again, Stan jumped out of his skin. Tired the next day, Stan forgot to deactivate the countermeasures and triggered them all himself. Fortunately, that only cured him of an interest in practical jokes and not of general fun and games which was certainly his lifetime signature as Uncle Stan to many.

As he progressed in his teaching career, he found himself closer and closer to Edmonton where his parents had settled. There he participated vigorously in United Church activities and youth leadership. Sure enough, there was one young woman with an appealing face and figure and an impressive leadership ability that manifested in jovial sing songs and eventually developed into full fledged civilization engineering. This young woman was not addled by an overblown exaltation of soldiers and flyboys. (Kathleen) Derwyn Whitbread and Stan married in August 1954.

Stan obtained a Masters in Education at the University of Alberta in Edmonton and joined the Edmonton Public Schools where he taught and pioneered wildly successful programs for the rest of a long career until he retired in 1986 and then was rehired on contract to write the history of the jewel in his crown, the Edmonton Public Schools Continuing Education Program. His hands-on style shifted from auto mechanics to carpentry and he had keys and access to every public school in Edmonton. The upshot was that he also had access for personal use to all of the many fancy machines and equipment present for vocational training in the high schools. That meant he had table saws, band saws

and huge indoor spaces in which to develop the pieces of his various building projects which his wife, daughter, granddaughter, family and friends all enjoyed and benefited from.

Stan and Derwyn lived in a rented walk-up apartment complex for the first few years of their marriage. It was a natural fit for them to become the managers of the complex. When Derwyn populated their apartment with furniture bought on credit, Stan's ambivalence about debt made him a bit unhappy although he saw Derwyn's point about not sleeping and sitting on the floor. They began their networking beyond the United Church and their lifelong deep foray into causes and politics. They invited so many interesting people into their life that these cannot be counted.

Despite their excellent material start, they had a shared ambition to undertake a great adventure. In 1961, they sold their possessions, moved in with Derwyn's parents and prepared to move to England and to explore Europe. To support this effort, Stan applied to work in a redemptive high school program in England that attempted to redirect students from a less academic to a more academic stream. The start date was delayed a year but in 1962 they moved to Europe, bought an Austin Mini Cooper car and drove all around meeting people and tasting the local cuisine, preferring to eat what they called "like peasants." Their go-to camping meal was a risotto with tomato, rice and cheese which they continued to eat and enjoy. They imported that car back to Canada when they returned a year later and drove it into the ground which became a lifelong pattern for Stan.

When they returned to Canada in 1963, they decided to purchase their forever home which cost them about \$13000. They entertained living in a fancier district but instead selected a home in Westmount which had actually been the first home built in the whole neighbourhood thus providing Stan an opportunity to utilize his carpentry skills as he preformed upgrades to the windows, basement and upstairs bedroom. For decades, their living room was a renowned salon of debate and ideas.

In 1967, Stan and Derwyn's daughter, Katherine, was born. Stan revelled in fatherhood offering endless patience for Katherine's learning, questions and providing her little saws, hammers and nails (and lots of sheets of messy styrofoam) to play with. Later, Stan recruited Katherine as steadier-in-chief for the carpentry projects giving Katherine the unreasonable but welcome conviction that she could learn anything, comprehend anything and do anything she set her mind to.

In about 1973, Stan and Derwyn sold their small property at Sylvan Lake which was adjacent to Derwyn's brother Bruce McLaughlin's lakeside cottage and bought a property near Stony Plain Alberta they called Roi Lakes. Whereas Derwyn envisioned a large cottage with an indoor space for entertainment, Stan's vision was more unique. He built what is best described as a lake-side Ewok Village with walkways and tents. The central entertaining area including a fire pit and a small building for inside entertaining. There was an outhouse but it was quite fancy and tolerably non smelly. There were tents but they had porches, doors, lights and raised walkways to and from. For their city friends, this provided a quasi civilized and less intimidating way to enjoy an overnight in a natural environment. Stan enjoyed the leeway to sketch and create like a painter on canvas. He provided activities like archery and a beautiful dock that allowed one to step into the pristine deep water without trudging through the muck at the lake's edge. He enjoyed cooling off in the water and appreciated help from various friends with his projects.

Katherine grew up and moved away which was a sorrow for both Stan and Derwyn. Their own siblings had also moved away to California, Red Deer, Kansas and Quebec but Stan and Derwyn remained in Edmonton lovingly and steadfastly supporting and caring for a lot of older relatives including all four of their parents. The Sunday Dinners with their parents and the holidays they hosted at their grand-feeling home contributed immeasurably to the fabric of the family. Stan was always available to prompt a ring game or a game of charades. Their cooking was fantastic.

Stan and Derwyn's social life included and revolved around a Gourmet Club that they started in the early '60s and led for decades. The routine was that whichever host whose turn it was would provide the space and the appetizers and the other members would bring the rest of the dishes required to explore a particular cuisine with each event themed in alignment to one culinary tradition. To be forthcoming, Stan and Derwyn and their friends could party any of their kids under the table. Adult children of members were specifically not invited although they invited many other guests. It took a while and a consensus for a person to get promoted from recurring guest to full membership.

Stan's working career was about forty years in duration. The extraordinary element was that he lived another approximately forty years *after* he retired. During much of his retirement, Derwyn continued her paid employment as a social worker guiding policy for the City of Edmonton and the Province of Alberta and as a teacher at Norquest College. Stan supported these efforts wonderfully with tape recorders, visual aids, transportation and encouragement. He was a Great Man behind that Great Woman. He was a steadfast supporter of women's rights and all of Derwyn's efforts. No marriage is perfect and yet the two were married a total of 68 years. They didn't seek to be admired for their relationship but they certainly were.

When Derwyn finally retired and started to diminish in her ability to care for herself, Stan brought her breakfast in bed every single day.

Even though Katherine and eventually Aurora when she was born lived away from Edmonton, they came for many long visits. Aurora stayed many Summers with her grandparents at the house and visiting the lake. One slightly painful aspect was the estrangement caused by a relentless problem with a stalker that prevented the two younger Whitbreads from safely living closer to Stan and Derwyn. But, as soon as Aurora was grown up enough to take care of herself, Katherine started planning to move back to Edmonton. Stan had continued to buy older cars and keep them until they were even older until one fateful day when Derwyn called Katherine with a report of the two having been stranded on a busy

highway at risk in the dark. At that point, Katherine insisted that her parents use the victim restitution money they'd been granted for a much newer and more reliable Toyota Avalon. In 2012, Katherine brought her family for a Summer visit and offered to move home to help her parents. Stan and Derwyn rejected that offer because they were still feeling equal to their days and nights with the support of their many friends. But a year later, Derwyn's failing health reversed their decision. Katherine arrived just in time in 2013 as Stan was beginning to struggle to take care of his beloved wife and she hadn't been out of bed for a month.

Thus began the finest season of Katherine's life so far, a decade caring for her parents. Stan aged gracefully in that final decade. In 2013, Katherine reminded Stan that, if he only lived to the same age as his father (which it turned out that he did, 98 years), he still had 10% of his adult life ahead of him. For two years, Derwyn remained an all-day-every-day focus of Stan's life until in 2015 she fell and broke her pelvis and never came home again.

Stan visited Derwyn every day. At first, he drove his car from his home to the Edmonton General. After 2020, he rode on his fancy scooter from across the street in an assisted living facility to visit Derwyn. In 2022, he moved into the Edmonton General and she moved onto his very unit, illustrious Unit 9C, where their rooms had a special hallway in between them down which Stan walked or wheeled in order to see Derwyn. The two enjoyed several months of this fine arrangement before Derwyn passed away in August 2022.

During his last few years at his own home, Stan enjoyed redecorating his house to match his own style. Previously, Derwyn had most of the leeway regarding the decor. Stan's aesthetic was a bit simpler and more modern. Katherine fished quite a few items out of the trash and took them home but couldn't begrudge her dad enjoying this new agency and purview to express his personal style.

Despite moving out of his home into assisted living, Stan pursued new aspects of physical health. He travelled several times a week to ReYu

Paralysis Recovery Centre to train with their staff especially with Kaitlyn Melenka. ReYu welcomed Stan as their oldest client. Stan enjoyed the relentless support for his mobility from a dedicated and gifted personal trainer who is a co-owner of 4 Points Health and Wellness, Alyssa Schmidt. Alyssa even trained Stan at the Edmonton General in order to help him retain his ability to walk as long as possible.

Stan's death was peaceful, graceful, apparently without pain. It seemed to be caused by complications arising from a wound on his foot that, despite valiant efforts by his doctor, the staff in his facility and a gifted massage therapist, Paul Kramer, just wouldn't heal. By the end, Stan's heart wasn't beating to its own rhythm any longer but to the steady 60 beats per minute provided by his pacemaker. In fact, Stan's final 15 years that we all got to enjoy can be credited to his pacemaker and the quick intervention of a patient beside him who called for help before Stan's heart failure could take him away prematurely.

What are the regrets of a man who lived such a life? He regretted not getting to know his father better. He wanted to hear more about his father's philosophy and beliefs and wished he had listened without skepticism. He honours a special faraway unnamed friend who helped him at one of his rare down moments to regain his joie de vivre. The writer speculates that Stan wonders whether all of his beloved friends and family know and trust that he reciprocates all that love.

Stan's beliefs about death were still a work in progress. He had transcended a prior limited skepticism and embraced the mystery of life, the universe and everything. He had reopened his mind and heart to new possibilities. His Neice, Lama Dechi, has mobilized the leaders of her order around the world to pray for a transition to whatever is next that matches the goodness and profoundly engaged life of our dear Stanley Bertram Whitbread.